



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Rm. 152 Federal Building 100 Centennial Mall North Lincoln, Neb. 68508
(402) 437-5551 (Phone) (402) 437-5093 TDY (402) 437-5408 (Fax)

Contact: Denise Brosius-Meeks
Business & Community Program Director
(402) 437-5559

**\$19 MILLION AVAILABLE FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES SUFFERING
EXTREME HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND SEVERE ECONOMIC DEPRESSION**

Lincoln, Neb., April 22—The Rural Housing Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced the \$19 million Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) referred to as the Economic Impact Initiative. These national competitive grant funds are available to eligible public entities, nonprofit corporations and Tribal governments to develop essential community facilities in rural communities with extreme high unemployment and severe economic depression.

The Economic Impact Initiative grants are targeted to communities with the smallest populations and lowest incomes. The essential community facility must be located in a rural community, population 20,000 or less, where the "not employed rate" is greater than 19.5 percent. This percentage represents the number of individuals over the age of 18 who reside within the community who are ready, willing and able to be employed but are unable to find employment as determined by the state's Department of Labor. Additional regulatory requirements must also be met.

Grant funds may be used to develop facilities in rural communities that include medical clinics, transitional housing, administrative office buildings, childcare centers, libraries, museums, food preparation centers, fire trucks, and other essential community facilities.

The Economic Impact Initiative also provides for local dial-up Internet access or broadband service. Grants will be made to state agencies for use by regulatory commissions to assist those rural communities without local dial-up Internet access or local broadband service. The state agencies will establish a competitive, technologically neutral grant program to telecommunications carriers or cable operators that will establish common carrier facilities and services that will result in the long-term availability of affordable broadband services used for high speed Internet access for the rural communities.

The USDA Rural Development State office will determine applicant eligibility. Once eligibility is established, the preapplication is evaluated competitively and points awarded as specified in the project selection priorities. The preapplication is then submitted to the National Office to compete for funding consideration.

Projects will be selected on a national competitive basis, with two windows of opportunity to compete for the funds. It is anticipated that the first round of funding selections will be made after May 10, 2002 with the second round occurring after August 23, 2002. To be considered for the first window, all preapplications along with supporting documentation must be received by the USDA Rural Development Lincoln State office by close of business May 3, 2002 and by August 16, 2002 for the second window. Projects not selected for funding consideration for the first round will remain eligible to compete for the next round of funding.

Entities wishing to apply for assistance in Nebraska should contact the USDA Rural Development State Office Attn. Denise Brosius-Meeks, Business & Community Program Director, Rm. 152 Federal Building 100 Centennial Mall North Lincoln, Nebraska 68508 or phone 402-437-5559. The Economic Impact Initiative NOFA can be downloaded at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/nofas/2002/cfped040902.txt>.

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